

## Home Tips Everyone Can Use

### By Lou Prinzi, CRI/RPI

**Question:** We finally moved into our new home and I remember you mentioned something during the home inspection about replacing the existing smoke detector and installing additional detectors. How many detectors should we install?

**Answer:** Studies conducted by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) have shown that smoke detectors consistently provide families enough time to escape most residential fires. The study takes into account the fact that detectors provide an average of three minutes warning. That is the time available to residents during which they must quickly flee. Researchers have shown that structural fires burn faster and more quickly today than in past decades, due in part to the types of furnishings and other materials found inside the average home. To guard against smoke inhalation in the case of a night time fire, smoke alarms should be placed on every floor of a home, on or within one foot of the bedroom ceiling.

Smoke alarms should then be tested at least once a month to make sure they operate properly. If a smoke alarm is battery-operated, the batteries need to be replaced at least once a year. It's a good practice to make replacement of the batteries a seasonal routine, such as resetting clocks in the fall or spring.

If a battery-powered smoke alarm begins to emit a low-power warning (usually a chirping sound), this high-pitched alert signifies the need to replace the batteries. All smoke alarms with the UL label (Underwriters Laboratory) have been certified with an expected useful life of 10 years.

Home security companies offer a monitoring service and will notify the fire department when your smoke/heat detector is triggered. In the event of a fire while someone is home, the fire department can be notified by pushing a single button on the home alarm system keypad.

Another important fire safety precaution is the placement of fire extinguishers in several areas in and around a home. Extinguishers can help ensure that small fires are quickly eliminated or at least contained before they develop into big fires. Like smoke detectors, fire extinguishers should be placed on every level of the home, including the kitchen, basement and garage. Fire extinguishers are rated for four classes of fires; A, B, C and D. Each class of fire has specific characteristics.

Each year, hundreds of people in the United States succumb to carbon monoxide poisoning, and thousands more suffer from the effects of the gas, often without even realizing it. Because CO symptoms mimic the flu and other common illnesses, CO poisoning can be easily missed during a routine medical examination or attributed to other causes.

The U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission recommends that every residence with fuel-burning appliances be equipped with at least one laboratory-tested CO alarm. For added protection, one can be placed on every level of the home. If an alarm indicates high levels of carbon monoxide in your home, family members should immediately move outside to fresh air. The problem must be corrected before it is safe to re-enter the home. It is never safe to ignore a CO Alarm.

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